

TITLE RACE COULD BE DECIDED THIS WEEK

STUART EARP looks at the Rothmans Isthmian League championship race

between these two clubs, which ended in a dramatic 2-2 draw at Southbury Road.

At one stage this season, Enfield looked certain champions. In fact, they topped the table for no less than six months. But during April, their fortunes changed dramatically. Things began well enough when they beat Hendon and Kingstonian 1-0. Then came the Wycombe game which ended at 2-2, Enfield equalising three minutes into "injury" time.

The following Saturday the Middlesex club travelled to second-from-bottom Woking. Against all the odds, they crash-

ed 2-1. That was followed by a 1-0 win over Slough at Maidenhead but they dropped three more points the next Saturday when losing 1-0 at home to Leatherhead. That defeat really took its toll.

Enfield drew their next three games at Hitchin 2-2, Oxford 1-1 and at home to Slough 0-0. Victory at Sutton on Friday night was imperative and they edged home 2-1 with a winner in the second half. Two goals by Les Eason did the damage while Alan Ives was Sutton's scorer with a penalty. Ex-Wycombe skipper Larry Pritchard did not play.

I watched Enfield draw at Oxford last month and they hardly looked like a side in the running for the championship. Indeed, one or two of their players scarcely seemed interested in the outcome. Their front runners were too anxious and although City keeper Peter Harris pulled off a couple of great saves later on, Enfield were far from confident.

They have been unable to field a settled team consistently and their front runners have been switched nearly every game. After Friday's victory at Sutton, however, manager Ted Hardy is expected to field that same side at Loakes Park.

Brian Davis, who has been out of the side for much of the season, will play at left back in place of the veteran Fred Callaghan while the two front runners are Derek Baker and Dennis Gill. These two make up probably the fastest striking pair in the whole division. Baker scored the first goal against Wycombe at Southbury Road while Gill's renowned speed always needs watching.

Enfield are totally committed to attack on Thursday. They can't afford to do anything else. A draw won't be good enough... three points are a must. It is that fact that could bring their downfall for under such pressure, gaps are almost inevitable at the back. They are also facing Wanderers' highly impressive record at Loakes Park, where they haven't lost for over two years in a league match.

Enfield could play three front men with Eason moving forward more than usual from their four-man midfield department. But it is the two speed merchants upfront that will present the Blues with their biggest problems.

In the first match against Enfield, Wanderers were caught a couple of times for speed and conceded a goal to Baker. The two centre backs, Keith Mead and Alan Phillips, will be given another testing this time but if they play as well as they have done all season, they will not go far wrong.

The Wycombe side is undecided at the time of writing but there are no injury worries and goalkeeper John Maskell has completely recovered from his bout of tonsillitis.

Latest table

ROTHMANS ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

DIVISION ONE UP TO 4/5/75

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| Enfield | 40 | 28 | 7 | 5 | 74 | 25 | 91 |
| Wycombe Wanderers | 38 | 26 | 9 | 3 | 88 | 29 | 87 |
| Dagenham | 37 | 26 | 5 | 6 | 80 | 35 | 83 |
| Ilford | 39 | 22 | 9 | 8 | 94 | 48 | 75 |
| Leatherhead | 38 | 22 | 8 | 8 | 78 | 37 | 74 |
| Tooting and Mitcham | 38 | 22 | 8 | 8 | 60 | 42 | 74 |
| Dulwich Hamlet | 38 | 20 | 10 | 8 | 64 | 37 | 70 |
| Slough Town | 40 | 17 | 6 | 18 | 68 | 51 | 57 |
| Oxford City | 39 | 16 | 9 | 15 | 68 | 51 | 57 |
| Sutton United | 39 | 16 | 6 | 18 | 64 | 60 | 54 |
| Bishop's Stortford | 39 | 16 | 6 | 17 | 54 | 56 | 54 |
| Hendon | 41 | 15 | 7 | 20 | 67 | 84 | 52 |
| Walthamstow Avenue | 40 | 13 | 8 | 19 | 53 | 57 | 47 |
| Hitchin Town | 36 | 13 | 8 | 15 | 50 | 59 | 47 |
| Woking | 40 | 12 | 9 | 19 | 50 | 68 | 45 |
| Barking | 37 | 12 | 7 | 18 | 55 | 68 | 43 |
| Hayes | 41 | 10 | 13 | 18 | 52 | 66 | 43 |
| Leytonstone | 42 | 12 | 7 | 23 | 42 | 61 | 43 |
| Kingstonian | 42 | 13 | 4 | 25 | 48 | 73 | 43 |
| Clapton | 40 | 11 | 4 | 25 | 45 | 87 | 37 |
| Walton and Hersham | 41 | 9 | 4 | 28 | 37 | 107 | 31 |
| Bromley | 41 | 6 | 2 | 33 | 24 | 109 | 20 |

AS the season enters its last 15 days, the battle for the Rothmans Isthmian League title could not be closer with three clubs still in with a chance of winning the championship. And with all three playing each other in the next two weeks, anything could happen.

The situation at the moment is this: Enfield have two more matches to play — away to Wycombe and home to Dagenham. If they win both, they will be champions with a total of 97 points.

Wycombe have four more matches left. If they win the lot they will retain the title they won on the final day of the season last term, with a total of 99 points: Wanderers' remaining games are Enfield, Bishop's Stortford and Dagenham at home and Tooting and Mitcham away.

Dagenham meanwhile, have five matches to play — at home to Hitchin and away to Leatherhead, Enfield, Wycombe and Tooting. If they win all five, they take the championship with 98 points.

One single defeat at any stage could see one of the three clubs blow their chances of the title and the first of these crucial matches come tonight (Tuesday) when Dagenham visit Leatherhead. On Thursday, Enfield pay the return visit to Loakes Park.

This encounter, which was originally scheduled for Good Friday but had to be postponed due to a snow-bound pitch, has been long awaited by Wycombe fans ever since the first game